

# Running Clean

## How to win on energy issues

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Promoting clean energy can help candidates win elections by providing positive solutions around some of the biggest concerns for voters—jobs and the economy, their security, and the health of their families. *Running Clean* shows how candidates have successfully connected with the public by linking their support for clean energy to real results, and lays out how other candidates can do the same in the future.

Despite the economic recession, clean energy is one of the few sectors generating jobs and enjoying growth. The American wind industry alone already has more than 400 manufacturing plants and directly employs 75,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Solar power is one of the fastest growing sectors of the U.S. economy and already employs more than 100,000 people (that's more than the coal industry).<sup>2,3</sup> Fully exploiting America's potential for cost-effective increases in energy efficiency would create more than 900,000 jobs and lower the country's energy bill by \$700 billion.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, while oil companies charge record prices at the gas pump, cleaner cars offer voters a way to keep more money in their pockets. In fact, the building of fuel-efficient cars has powered Detroit's comeback and prompted more than 20 electric vehicle component factories to open or expand in the Midwest in the past two years alone.<sup>5</sup>

Dirty energy releases dangerous pollutants—smog, soot, carbon, and toxic compounds—that threaten public health by causing respiratory illnesses, heart disease, cancer, and premature death. Parents of the seven million American children who suffer from asthma welcome the chance to clean up the air.<sup>6</sup> So do other groups, such as medical professionals who treat impacted individuals,

and low-income communities who suffer a disproportionate burden from air pollution.<sup>7</sup> Expanding our reliance on clean energy protects public health.

Solutions to these challenges exist right now.

Clean energy is building a new economy based on the spirit of American innovation. It will create new job opportunities, reduce our dependence on oil, and protect us from pollution that threatens our health and contributes to climate change. Voters understand this—and they are supporting elected officials who share that vision. Clean energy is a win-win issue for candidates; in addition to being good public policy, it is good politics.



## CLEAN ENERGY HAS BROAD APPEAL

Extensive polling confirms that clean energy and its benefits have broad appeal across the political spectrum.

Indeed, it often unites people who are otherwise divided. According to a May 2011 poll by the Yale Project on Climate Communication,<sup>8</sup> 91 percent of Americans say developing sources of clean energy should be a priority for the President and Congress, including 85 percent of Republicans, 89 percent of independents, and 97 percent of Democrats. In June 2011, Stanford University released a report in which 86 percent of participants said they wanted the federal government to limit the air pollution that businesses emit, and 76 percent favored government restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions from businesses.<sup>9</sup>

Voters respond well to clean energy for a number of different reasons. Polling numbers prove it.

The March 2011 Gallup Environment poll found that 66 percent of Americans considered “development of alternative energy such as wind and solar power” as the preferred approach for addressing energy concerns (only 26 percent chose “production of more oil, gas, and coal supplies”).<sup>10</sup> In another Gallup poll in February 2011, when asked what action they would like Congress to take in the year ahead, 83 percent of respondents favored an energy bill that provides incentives for using alternative energy (beating out the 76 percent who supported an overhaul of the federal tax code and the 72 percent who supported a more rapid withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan).<sup>11</sup>

Clean energy attracts broad support, in part, because voters see it working in their own states—at least 37 states already require utilities to meet a certain percentage of electricity from renewable energy.<sup>12</sup> For example, Iowa now gets nearly 20 percent of its energy from wind power, and the supply

chain for the industry supports 2,300 local jobs and involves more than 80 Iowa businesses.<sup>13</sup> California’s renewable energy requirement was so successful that a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers agreed to raise it to 33 percent.<sup>14</sup> Texas’s requirement, meanwhile, has enabled it to produce more wind power than all but five countries in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the vast majority of Americans—across political parties—support protecting public health from air pollution. For example, 78 percent of Americans believe the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) “should protect the air we breathe and the water we drink with safeguards that hold corporate polluters accountable for the pollution they release into our environment,” including 87 percent of Democrats, 69 percent of Republicans, and 74 percent of independents.\* When testing the value of protecting public health from pollution against economic concerns, pollsters found that voters express a strong preference for protecting public health. When asked to choose between the National Association of Manufacturers’ argument against cutting carbon pollution, namely, “EPA’s overregulation threatens manufacturers, businesses, and jobs throughout America. Its actions will increase manufacturers’ energy costs and make it more difficult to compete” and the American Lung Association’s argument that the manufacturer’s agenda “would strip away Clean Air Act protections that safeguard Americans and their families from air pollution that puts their lives at risk,” 58 percent of all voters firmly sided with protecting health, including 69 percent of Democrats, 55 percent of independents, and a plurality of Republicans (48 percent).

The American public clearly understands that clean energy provides greater opportunities than dirty fuels such as oil and coal.<sup>16</sup> If candidates harness this support correctly, it can translate to votes in the ballot booth.

\*Polling of 784 adults between February 18 and 20, 2011, by Public Policy Polling, Inc.

***“What we are seeing consistently is support for renewable energy. We ought to be doing more. Voters’ support of a Renewable Electricity Standard is 65%, across the partisan spectrum. They are coming at this from a very positive view of renewable energy.”***

**Lori Weigel, Republican strategist and pollster with Public Opinion Strategies**

But this public support has to be earned. Candidates need to talk about the issues persuasively and often—otherwise clean energy does not become a priority issue or the campaign asset that it could potentially be, and, in fact, can become a drawback if an opponent is allowed to spread mistruths.

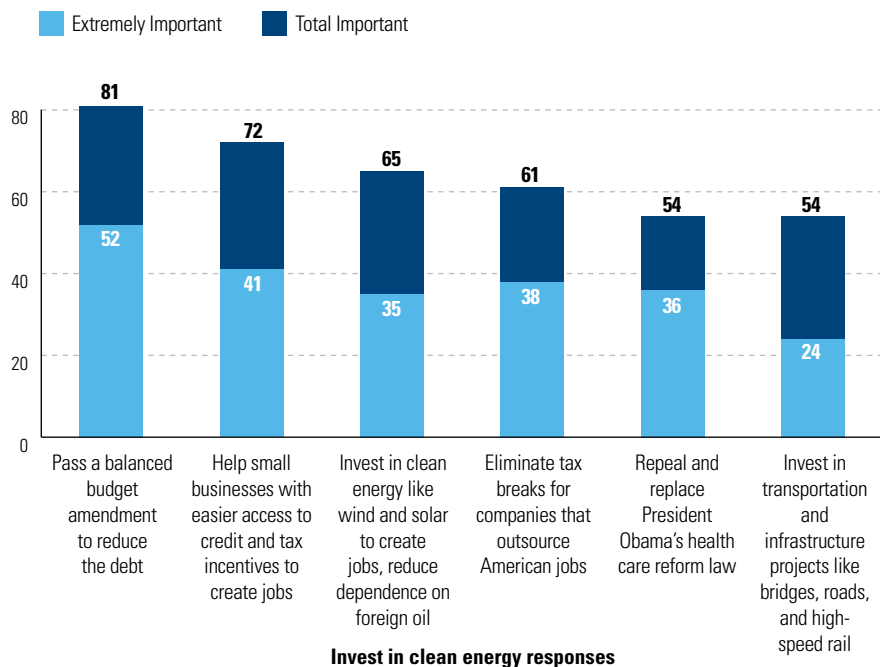
A successful candidate is able to weave the clean energy narrative around the economy and need for innovation, which is front of mind for many American voters. This will be the case in 2012, just as it has been in 2010, 2008, and 2006.<sup>17,18</sup> Fortunately, past elections give us a number of good examples of how this can work, and help establish a number of best practices for future candidates.

## THE ROLE OF CLEAN ENERGY IN THE 2010 ELECTIONS

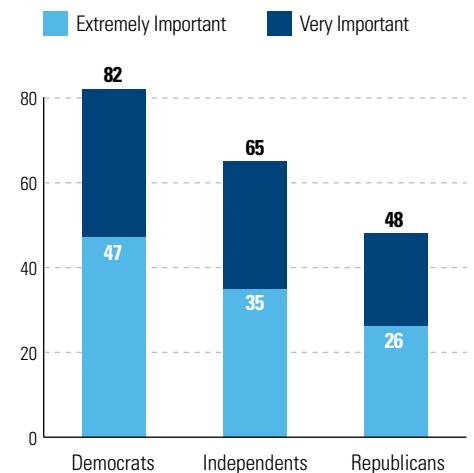
From California to Virginia, state polling during the run-up to the 2010 election found widespread support for clean energy: An NRDC Action Fund battleground poll (conducted from October 11th through 12th, 2010, in 23 toss-up Congressional Districts across the country) found that, on average, voters were almost 20 percentage points more likely to vote for someone who supports clean energy legislation.<sup>19</sup> Even in the more traditional manufacturing centers of the Midwest and South, voters supported clean energy and were more likely to support candidates who shared their belief. And even in conservative districts, voters supported renewable energy by double digits over coal and nuclear power. In fact, this remained consistent even in districts where coal mining is prominent.

In a 2010 election-night poll, by a coalition of environmental and labor organizations, Democrats, independents, and Republicans showed that they wanted Congress to prioritize investments in clean energy.<sup>20</sup> Independents, however, expressed the strongest support, as shown in the figure below.

### Independent Voters Support Clean Energy



### “Invest in Clean Energy” Responses by Party



Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Some pundits incorrectly argued that the House vote on the 2009 American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES) played a pivotal role in the 2010 election, a premise that is refuted by very solid data in a report, by Seth Masket of the University of Denver and Steven Greene of North Carolina State, that examined the effect of four key roll call votes (i.e., health care reform, the stimulus, ACES, and the financial bailout) on election outcomes.<sup>21</sup> The report concluded that the ACES vote did not negatively impact incumbents who voted for it and that other issues played a prominent role in deciding the election's outcomes.

In fact, a review of the election results shows that those candidates who voted in support of clean energy did better than those who did not.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, a majority of voters (almost 53 percent on average) in tight races around the country said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports a clean energy bill, according to polling done for the NRDC Action Fund in the fall of 2010.<sup>19</sup> When the same poll presented the opposition's main opposition talking point (that the bill was akin to a job-killing energy tax), voters rejected this idea by more than 18 percentage points in favor of a bill that creates new jobs, reduces our use of foreign oil, and holds corporate polluters accountable.

Clearly, effectively communicating with local communities about the potential of clean energy provides a deep well of support for candidates—and a useful way to differentiate oneself from one's opponents. Voters seem receptive to the issue if the candidate is willing to make it a positive focus and to effectively communicate its many benefits.



## HOW TO TALK ABOUT CLEAN ENERGY

### Know Your Audience: Proposition 23

In 2010, Texas oil companies helped fund a California ballot initiative to roll back the state's landmark clean energy and climate law.

With California suffering the second highest unemployment rate in the nation, the oil companies claimed their ballot initiative (Proposition 23) would support job growth.<sup>23</sup> At first, clean-tech companies and the environmental community fought back by explaining how the clean energy law worked, but their complicated message got drowned out by the oil companies' advertising.<sup>24</sup>

The coalition opposing the proposition quickly shifted gears and began polling to find out what aspect of their issue most motivated voters, particularly undecided voters. The data revealed that keeping families safe from air pollution was a top priority—and when voters learned that Proposition 23 would lead to dirtier skies, they opposed it.

Polling also showed that California voters did not like out-of-state companies interfering with their laws.<sup>25</sup> Voters also believed that clean energy brought jobs to the state and that it was already one of California's fastest growing sectors.

Of these messaging options, research showed that health concerns and the interference by Texas oil companies were the most persuasive themes. A "No on Proposition 23" strategy was crafted around these findings and other research conducted during the campaign season. The resulting strategies included:

- Highlighting the damage Proposition 23 would do to clean air and public health.
- Exposing that the proposition's supporters were Texas oil companies.
- Making the case that Proposition 23 would cost jobs by killing California's clean energy and clean technology industries.
- Explaining that Proposition 23 would increase costs by keeping us addicted to oil.

This message research proved highly successful. On Election Day, Californians defeated Prop 23 by a ratio of 2 to 1.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the defeat of Proposition 23 gained more support than everything else on the ballot, including the gubernatorial and Senate races. Even counties that backed Republican candidates shot down Proposition 23.

This sent a resounding message to political leaders. Now, California can focus on implementing the law and reducing global warming pollution by 25 percent by 2020—an effort that will create nearly 85,000 jobs and increase the state's gross domestic product (GDP) by \$60 billion.<sup>27</sup>

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***“Clean energy was our #1 issue in terms of a positive reason to vote for Harry Reid. It was huge with Independents—it was the #1 issue. We used it in everything we did.”***

**Brandon Hall, campaign manager  
Reid for Senate**

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### **Make Clean Energy Local: Senator Harry Reid of Nevada**

Senator Reid was one of the most endangered incumbents in the nation in 2010. To win, he focused on job growth with a specific emphasis on the jobs in the renewable energy sector. In fact, the very first ad produced by the campaign focused on clean energy.<sup>28</sup>

Reid settled on this approach after careful research that, not surprisingly, found voters most concerned about jobs and the economy. More interesting, however, was that voters found narratives about “clean energy jobs” most powerful.

More specifically, the campaign found that talking about the 41,000 jobs created in Nevada’s clean energy sector was too abstract. Instead, research showed that voters needed to hear about concrete examples, such as the jobs created at a particular solar plant or new jobs at a geothermal facility. And voters needed to see that these jobs were being created now, not at some future date.

The campaign’s first ad focused on a man who had been unemployed but who was now working at a solar manufacturing facility.<sup>29</sup> He said he wouldn’t have had his clean energy job without the efforts of Senator Reid to bring jobs to Nevada:

*“One of the things I liked about the issue was it brought people together. You could have a CEO, next to a labor guy, next to an environmentalist.”*

- Brandon Hall, campaign manager, Reid for Senate

Reid’s opponent, Sharron Angle, referred to clean energy jobs as “designer” jobs.<sup>29</sup> She focused her energy messaging on increased drilling in Alaska and along the Gulf Coast. The Reid campaign happily engaged on this issue and pointed out that Senator Reid was bringing clean energy jobs to Nevada while his opponent was supporting policies that would only create jobs in Alaska and the Gulf Coast. Moreover, the Reid campaign used Angle’s policy positions to connect her with unpopular “Big Oil” and other special interests.

### **Attract Independents with Concrete Examples: Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado**

Colorado politicians have taken advantage of renewable energy themes and imagery in campaign ads since the state passed a ballot measure establishing a renewable electricity standard in 2004. In his first ad in the 2006 governor race, Bill Ritter talked about the new energy economy while standing in front of wind turbines.<sup>30</sup> In 2009, President Obama signed the Recovery Act into law at a solar panel installation at the Denver Museum of Science and Nature.<sup>31</sup>

When the Bennet campaign conducted message testing, jobs and the economy were top issues for voters. “Renewable energy jobs” was one of the top five messages tested—and it tested very well with independents:

*“It was an easy positive issue for us to use as a verifier about jobs. These jobs represented some of the only new jobs created in a bad economic time. We ran three TV ads that featured renewable energy in some form.”*

- Craig Hughes, campaign manager, Bennet for Senate

Like the Reid campaign, the Bennet campaign focused on the specific jobs created and related job sites rather than using larger, more abstract numbers about job growth. The campaign did several media events at solar and wind facilities throughout the state. Showcasing these installations helped focus the public’s attention on job creation that was already happening and made it more tangible to constituents.

### **Emphasize How Manufacturing Can Be Revived: Betty Sutton of Ohio and Tom Perriello of Virginia**

Northwestern Ohio has seen mass layoffs and is no stranger to empty industrial facilities. However, as Representative Betty Sutton pointed out during her campaign, there is also great potential to harness the region’s manufacturing expertise for growing sectors like renewable energy.<sup>32</sup> This is not an abstract concept: more than 650 Ohio companies are already involved in some way in producing parts for wind energy.<sup>33</sup>

Sutton, who represents Ohio’s 13th District, shared how she talked about the issue in her district:

*“We have a lot of things going on in the development of alternative and new energy that is going to be powered by American workers ... We have examples to present to people. We see work happening to sort of break down those fears that we have in my district. What we saw this year was groundbreaking at a BASF factory where they’re going to build the most advanced lithium ion battery factory in North America. That doesn’t just create jobs for the short term. That creates opportunities, not just with these batteries and this facility, but for new technologies and improved environmental quality products.”*



Sutton noted that Ohio sends \$1.5 billion out of state to pay for energy imported from other states. But she said it does not have to be this way: Ohio's open skies and more than 76,000 farms mean it could generate much more energy locally by utilizing the wind, sun, and other renewable energy sources.<sup>34</sup>

Although former Congressman Tom Perriello of Virginia lost his race, he does not attribute his defeat to his stance on clean energy. In fact, his race also ended up much closer than many pundits thought it would, in part because he defended so well his record in Congress on issues such as clean energy.<sup>35</sup> Reflecting on his 2010 re-election campaign, Mr. Perriello explained how clean energy was a bright spot in what ultimately was a losing campaign:

*"In our district, pollsters asked, 'Who do you trust more on energy?' and I won that argument by 14 points in a Republican district, in the era of cap and trade when the industry groups spent millions on the other side. I think we can't back away from the fight that we know is one of the most important for America's national security, for America's competitiveness, and from America's public health and security. We shouldn't back off from it since industry groups are going to go out lie about it."*

Perriello won voter support for this policy stance by explaining how clean energy can revive the manufacturing sector:

*"We have empty factories around southern Virginia where we used to make textiles and furniture. We could be building the great advanced battery of the future, the efficiency*

*technologies of the future. We're not going to do that if we continue to do the status quo in 15 years in the way we did 15 years ago. Clean energy is how we are going to out-compete the world."*

### **Clean Energy Is Often the Best Way to Tell a Positive Story about the Economy: Martin Heinrich of New Mexico**

In many states, clean energy provides one of the most positive, growth-oriented narratives. And it's one that voters believe in, because they already see it working. Representative Martin Heinrich used this good news to his advantage. New Mexico is ranked second in the nation for solar energy potential and wind energy could provide nearly 75 times the state's current electricity needs.<sup>36,37</sup> Beyond these statistics, residents are seeing clean energy deliver power to their communities from wind turbines on the side of the highway and from solar panels on their roofs.

As a consequence of this strong industry base and public support, the Heinrich campaign was able to successfully showcase the benefits of clean energy and leverage constituent support.<sup>38</sup> According to the pollster for Heinrich campaign, Michael Bocian, "clean energy was part of most of our positive ads in 2010. It was a central part of his campaign in 2008."

## HOW TO WIN WITH CLEAN ENERGY

Clean energy enjoys public support and can be couched in terms that stir voters' interest, but a candidate can be most effective by following a number of best practices that have worked well for other campaigns.

### Conduct Meaningful Research and Be Specific

Research can help identify the best way to communicate clean energy issues for different target audiences. For example, focus groups in many areas have shown that voters frequently make the connection between jobs and clean energy without prompting. And while research has shown that voters do not relate to bigger, abstract numbers like “tens of thousands of jobs,” they do resonate to concrete examples of new or existing clean energy jobs in their area.

One key research goal for campaigns should be to identify clean energy sources such as wind, solar, energy efficiency, and geothermal companies or their suppliers in their district or state. The campaign should also identify small business owners and workers who are willing to go on the record about the creation of new jobs due to enactment of clean energy policies. For example, in Michigan more than 200 renewable energy companies have been established, and clean tech is the state's fastest growing sector, with \$10 billion in announced clean energy development investments in the pipeline.<sup>39</sup> Every state has similar stories that can be woven into the campaign narrative.

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***“If we look narrowly at a poll and see energy is number seven on a list of top issues and they care more about jobs and health care and government spending you are going to miss the narrative you can tell in a campaign with clean energy.”***

**Michael Bocian,  
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research**

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Job creation and the economy feature very prominently in many polls and focus groups, but voters see clean energy as a key part of the economy and job creation. Therefore, to develop the most effective message possible, a campaign needs to probe a little deeper than just the surface issues. This kind of probing from the Reid re-election campaign yielded that the clean energy jobs message was the best positive issue for the Senator. It is also how the Bennet campaign used clean energy as a key validator of successful job creation.

Also, the renewable energy industries are quickly innovating—technology is getting better and prices are dropping for consumers.<sup>40</sup> Find examples that help tell that story and how it means better energy choices for our future.

### Develop a Winning Clean Energy Narrative

A candidate will have difficulty capturing voters' hearts and minds without a compelling narrative that frames the issues at hand. The battle to defeat Proposition 23 in California demonstrated that the “victim, villain, and opportunity” narrative is an effective way to engage constituent support.<sup>41</sup> The elements of this structure are:

- **Victim:** Highlight the person or group that is being hurt by the situation or proposal. Ideally, it should be the person whom you are messaging (make the “pain” as personal as possible).
- **Villain:** Identify the individual, group, or company that is hurting the victim, whether through their actions or their inactions.
- **Opportunity:** Highlight the ways that the villain can be stopped and a meaningful solution achieved.

Frankly, some politicians are afraid to take on polluting corporations because of their deep pockets. However, according to polling by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (see Figure 1), voters are “furious” with oil companies.<sup>42</sup> This means that dirty energy industries who stand in the way of progress are excellent villains when a campaign is making the case for clean energy.

In reality, voters—especially independents—are more generally frustrated by corporate involvement in elections.<sup>43</sup> In one CNN poll, 86 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “Elected officials in Washington are mostly influenced by the pressure they receive on issues from major campaign contributors.”<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, candidates who shine a spotlight on polluting industries' electoral initiatives can effectively counter these potential critics while reinforcing more positive clean energy messaging.

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***“We are sending, every single day, tens of millions, hundreds of millions of dollars overseas to buy foreign-source oil... And it’s crazy. Why not spend the money right here in our own country developing alternative energy sources—solar energy, wind turbines, hydropower?”***

**Representative Sherwood Boehlert,  
former congressman, New York**

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### **Get Real about Gas Prices and Dirty Fuels**

The American public is once again paying high prices at the gas pump. Polling clearly shows that voters want candidates who move the country toward a clean and renewable energy future instead of keeping America handcuffed to Big Oil and more drilling. In fact, nearly 6 in 10 Americans (58 percent) in a poll by Belden Russonello & Stewart said they would choose a candidate who supports moving beyond oil as an energy source.<sup>16</sup>

NRDC’s *Fighting Oil Addiction* report gives a ranking of each state’s gasoline price vulnerability and the available solutions.<sup>45</sup> By using information like this and other resources, candidates can channel the public’s frustration about gas prices and offer meaningful solutions that will capture voter’s imagination. For example, President Obama is expected to release draft clean car standards in the coming months. Strong standards could cut driver bills at the pump in half and could also reduce our nation’s oil consumption by at least 38 billion gallons.<sup>46</sup> These are the kinds of solutions lawmakers can support knowing that voters will stand with them.

Similarly, many states are ahead of the current national energy policy. For example, at least 37 states have some form of Renewable Electricity Standard requirement.<sup>12</sup> In each state where the standard was put to voters, it passed. Yet there is no similar requirement at the national level.

According to prominent Republican pollster Lori Weigel, most voters believe the lack of a renewable energy standard is due to special interests and their lobbyists working to block common-sense legislation. Responding to this frustration is a great opportunity for candidates looking to demonstrate leadership and help shape a narrative.

### **Show A Broad Coalition of Support**

Clean energy attracts support from a wide range of audiences—workers, small business owners, larger business leaders, and labor unions see the economic benefits of investing in advanced energy solutions. In many cases, there are local groups that are most invested in the community, but there are also national groups that work on related issues, including:

- National security experts and veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, including groups like Vote Vets, who see clean energy as a way to break our dependence on oil from despotic regimes
- The Blue Green Alliance, consisting of unions and environmental groups, helps embody the broad support for clean energy (the group has launched a campaign to spotlight the good jobs available from clean energy jobs and is organizing and hosting events across the country)
- Doctors, nurses, public health officials, and parents appreciate the way these clean solutions reduce dangerous pollution, health groups—such as Healthcare Without Harm and the American Lung Association—powerful voices for proper pollution safeguards that protect our communities
- Women’s and parents’ organizations with powerful examples of families who have suffered as a result of dirty air or anti-environmental business practices
- Good governance organizations such as the League of Women Voters, who represent communities and encourage businesses to be good neighbors

### **Communicate What Is at Stake: National Security, American Leadership, and Jobs**

Clean energy offers a variety of positive messages. But campaigns can also demonstrate what is at stake if the United States does not embrace cleaner more sustainable solutions.

At a time when unemployment remains high, candidates can emphasize the ability of clean energy investments to generate jobs—not only in a particular facility, but also at those companies that support that facility (a wind turbine has more than a thousand parts).<sup>47</sup> People quickly understand that this mean jobs not only for the steel workers building the parts, but also for the drivers who transport the parts and all the other “upstream” or “downstream” industries.

To tap into this public support, the Bennet campaign in Colorado used wind turbine and solar panel imagery extensively in its mail and TV outreach. Governor McDonnell used this imagery in Virginia in a campaign ad about bringing new jobs to the state and promoting innovation.



Similarly, many candidates have highlighted the need for American leadership or emphasized China's efforts to spearhead the global clean energy economy. During the 2010 election cycle, the NRDC Action Fund partnered with the Blue Green Alliance to determine which messages were most effective at increasing support for clean energy jobs candidates. Our research showed that the most effective messages were those that emphasized a national security message (e.g., "Invest in energy from the Midwest instead of the Middle East," and "We send Iran \$100 million a day when we should be creating jobs in Ohio.") In fact, the research found that persuadable voters were most responsive to the "security" message, with 13 percent of those surveyed more likely to be persuaded to support a candidate who supported clean energy policies.

Voters have begun to draw greater connections between our national security and the need for oil independence. Bipartisan organizations, like VoteVets made the critical connection between our national security and our energy security even more compelling in the 2010 election.

During the 2010 election, VoteVets ran ads throughout the country drawing the connection. The organization also released a study conducted by Lake Research Group, which illustrated that veterans also support clean energy.<sup>49</sup> The poll found that 73 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans support clean energy climate change legislation from the last Congress, 79 percent believe ending our dependence on foreign oil is important to national security, and 67 percent support the argument that such legislation will help their own economic prospects. Jon Solz, Iraq War Veteran and Chairman of VoteVets explained:

*"This poll confirms what we always knew was true—veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan know, first-hand, the destructive effect our dependence on oil has on our national security, and on the battlefield. They are well aware of arguments made in favor and against bi-partisan clean energy and climate change legislation, and firmly fall into the group of Americans supportive of passing that comprehensive legislation. Veterans of the wars we're fighting want legislation passed now."*

In future elections, the importance of different issues will shift according to events and the strength of the economy. Proper research and message testing will allow candidates to clarify whether national security is the best message for their race, or whether to highlight other priority issues. Moreover, this research will help identify the frames that most interest local voters and persuades them to support a candidate.

### Talk about Health

Jobs and other economic issues are front of mind for many people, but polling has shown that people strongly support proper health safeguards against pollution from dirty industries.<sup>50</sup> This means candidates can garner support by talking about the solutions offered by clean energy, even if the state doesn't yet have a strong clean energy industrial base.

An example of this scenario is currently unfolding in Congress: some members of Congress who are beholden to polluters are attacking the EPA's important work to protect our health and clean air.<sup>51</sup> Polls show that these efforts are unpopular—and that the best way to counter this line of attack is to talk about the health impacts of these choices, especially on children's health.<sup>52,53</sup>

Focusing on health brings the issue directly into people's homes. This can be done by linking air pollution with asthma attacks, other respiratory illnesses, and even premature death. This issue cuts across all demographic groups, but naturally has special resonance with soccer moms, who are often the most persuadable independent voters.

The concern about illnesses from air pollution also speaks directly to particular groups that are disproportionately affected, such as people in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Currently, for example, in the growing Latino constituency in the United States, 1 out of every 10 children is affected by asthma,<sup>54</sup> a staggering number. Latinos are also three times as likely to die of asthma as white non-Hispanics. This is due, in part, to the fact that nearly half of all Hispanic-Americans live in counties that frequently violate ground-level ozone or smog standards, according to the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention.<sup>55</sup>



### **Tie Opponents to Their Donations from Dirty Industries**

There are real, positive themes in clean energy messaging. But there is also the opportunity to link opponents with unpopular Big Oil or the Koch Brothers. For example, campaigns can tie opposition to corporate polluters making record profits while Americans continue to pay record prices at the gas pump and remain dependent on oil.<sup>55</sup> It helps to have a clear, positive message on clean energy, but to also show how the other side is allied with dirty energy special interests.

Big Oil consistently scores poorly in polls because voters believe that special interests are the reason behind delays in clean energy development. By highlighting opponents' contributions from Big Oil, a candidate can develop a stronger base of support. New Mexico's Tom Udall successfully did this against his opponent, Steve Pearce, in the 2008 Senate Race.

Even if the opposition has not taken significant money from Big Oil or other dirty industries, a campaign can highlight how the opponent's policies favor dirty industries over the well-being of voters. Senator Michael Bennet's campaign used this tactic successfully against Ken Buck in the Colorado Senate race in 2010 and Senator Reid's campaign did the same against Sharon Angle.

Polling conducted for the NRDC Action Fund illustrated the importance of this issue for voters—nearly half (49 percent) said they would be less likely to support the reelection of a member of Congress who took campaign contributions from the oil industry and also voted to increase oil drilling, compared with only 11 percent of voters who said that they would be more likely to vote for such a member.

### **Understand that People Want Clean Energy**

Clean energy represents an incredible opportunity for candidates and the communities they hope to represent. Across the country, candidates have successfully used it in their campaigns, and have won.

Clean energy represents the best of American values, such as innovation and entrepreneurship. Candidates will be successful when they take this message forward, whether celebrating a new battery research facility in Ohio, watching a new wind turbine turn powerfully against a Texan sky, and standing with the entrepreneurs and workers who make it happen, and the families who breathe cleaner air as a result.

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**Find out more about running on clean energy at [www.runningclean.org](http://www.runningclean.org)**

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# ENDNOTES

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